

Sanpete County Planning Commission Work Meeting

May 19, 2026 5:30 P.M.

Sanpete County Courthouse, 160 North Main, Room 101, Manti, Utah

Attendees: Planning Commission Chair Cody Harmer, Board Members: Claudia Jarrett, Gene Jacobson, Justin Atkinson and Jo-Anne Riley. Also in attendance is Sanpete County Commissioner Mike Bennett, Sanpete County Deputy Clerk Heather Pyper and Sanpete County Zoning Administrator Heidi Sorensen. Dallin Carter has been excused

Planning Commission Chair Cody Harmer calls meeting to order.

Approval of the Agenda

A motion is made by Jo-Anne Riley to approve the agenda.

Claudia Jarrett seconded the motion. All in favor, none opposed and the motion passes. Vote by voice: Jo-Anne Riley, Gene Jacobson, Claudia Jarrett, yes; Cody Harmer, Aye.

Justin Atkinson came in late.

Discussion of updates to Sanpete County Land Use Matrix.

The meeting opened with a discussion regarding James's submitted documents and the ongoing effort to update the county matrix. It was noted that current definitions must coincide with recently updated business licenses, as the land use matrix is currently missing a significant amount of information. Ms. Sorensen directed the commission to a book James compiled which is available on the shared Google Drive, which contains research from surrounding counties. The commission acknowledged that while the volume of information is daunting, it is a necessary update for unzoned areas that has been long delayed. Mr. Harmer suggested to divide the document into sections, allowing members to review a specific number of pages and redline concerns individually before meeting as a group. Ms. Jarrett gave an alternative approach, which is to review the first 10 or 15 pages collectively to establish a consistent rhythm for deciding how definitions fit into the matrix and whether they should be classified as conditional uses. Mr. Harmer expressed a desire for significant eyes on the document to avoid the pitfalls of past committees that relied too heavily on summaries, which led to oversights. Mr. Jacobson reflects on past experiences after the departure of previous staff, Mr. Jacobson recalled how land use updates often stalled when

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addressed only during regular meetings. The consensus was that without a strict timeline and a requirement to study the material, no progress would be made. A compromise was reached to take a piecemeal approach, reviewing 10 pages a week with members emailing their thoughts to one another prior to meetings. Mr. Jacobson also suggested organizing the review by zones, such as commercial, industrial, or PUD, but ultimately decided to prioritize the business license categories, as that is the immediate source of the current software and licensing conflicts. Heidi agreed to break down the requirements based on business license categories and definitions. It was noted that research already follows the clerk's office numbering system, allowing for direct tracking between the licenses and the new reference sheets. The commission discussed the high volume of definitions pulled from various sources, noting that while 90% of the categories currently lack definitions in the county code, the new research provides a strong foundation. The discussion shifted toward the fee schedule, with Ms. Pyper clarifying that the Planning Commission does not approve fees; that authority rests with the County Commissioners. Ms. Sorensen noted that many current inquiries, particularly for home-based businesses, are being managed under "home-based industry" definitions to avoid unnecessary conditional use permits for low-impact work like computer consulting. Ms. Jarrett states missing items, such as private aviation Bunk House and ranch, noting that the numbering system must remain organized. A brief update confirmed that information regarding airports and landing strips would be addressed in a future public hearing. The members then debated the best way to physically review the 80-plus pages of new material, with some members preferring printed copies for handwritten notes over digital Google Doc collaboration. To illustrate the utility of the new research, a definition for a dog grooming business was read aloud, demonstrating how detailed criteria can help determine if a business belongs in a commercial, industrial, or home-occupation zone. The commission discussed the evolving nature of conditional use permits, moving away from using them as a catch-all for "undetermined" uses and instead using them to apply specific conditions within a defined zone. The commission concluded by discussing the need for more overlay zones to cover modern business types that do not fit into the existing eight zones. To ensure the work is completed, the group agreed to dedicate 30 minutes at the end of every regular meeting to this project and to schedule additional work meetings. Due to the

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upcoming election and ballot security, the meeting locations will alternate. The commission set the next work meetings for June 10th at 5:30 PM in the lower room and June 24th at 5:30 PM in the upstairs commission room.

Discussion of Sanpete County Subdivision Ordinance 13.24.140(2) Easement Standards.

Ms. Sorensen states, this discussion regarding an ordinance that requires a perimeter easement of no less than 50 feet around the circumference of lots within a subdivision. It was noted that while the ordinance exists, the Commission has recently been trending toward stricter setbacks on the plat rather than formal easements. Mr. Jacobson clarified that the current ordinance allows this body to make recommendations to the County Commissioners to waive this requirement on a case-by-case basis, raising the question of whether the ordinance should be strictly enforced or formally amended. Ms. Sorensen cited a specific instance, the Poulson subdivision near Moroni, where a well protection zone encroached over a property line. It was noted that with existing 10-foot setbacks, the necessity of a redundant easement is questionable. Mr. Jacobson states, the original intent of such easements, with members arguing that easements are often intended to protect future development, yet a developer should not necessarily be forced to encumber their property to make a neighbor's future development easier. An exception was noted for subdivisions on a city grid or in buffer zones where utility extensions or secondary irrigation lines, like those requested by Centerfield City, might be necessary. Ms. Jarrett proposed was to leave the requirement as a possibility rather than a mandate, relying on the recommendation of the Planning Administrator. If Ms. Sorensen or a city requests an easement during the review process, it would be presented to the Commission for approval. Mr. Atkinson argued that 10-foot easements are standard in municipalities for drainage and swales; however, others strongly disagreed with the idea of a neighbor having inherent rights to a subject property. Mr. Jacobson shared an example from Fountain Green where a neighbor improperly accessed an irrigation line, illustrating the potential for conflict when easements are misunderstood or misused. The consensus began to form that easements should only be mandatory for utilities on road frontages or when specified in city buffer zone agreements. For larger, more dense

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developments, easements might be necessary to mitigate flooding and manage runoff, whereas a single-lot subdivision in the middle of the county likely does not require such restrictions. Members agreed that there is no "one size fits all" solution and that the decision should remain case-specific. The Planning Administrator was identified as the best person to evaluate these needs, as Ms. Sorensen reviews the property and understands the specific drainage or utility issues of each subdivision. It was noted that the current language in the ordinance states an easement "may be required" or "if required by the Land Use Authority." The Commission determined that this existing language is sufficient, as it provides the flexibility to mandate an easement if a well or power line is already installed, without making it a blanket requirement for every lot. The conversation concluded with a focus on well source protection zones. Mr. Jacobson noted that property owners are increasingly drilling wells that result in 100-foot protection radii encroaching on neighboring parcels. The Commission agreed that it is the responsibility of the property owner to ensure their well is placed correctly to avoid encroachment. It was decided that the ordinance does not need to be changed to accommodate mistakes made during well placement. The group reaffirmed that because the ordinance says "if required" rather than "is required," the Commission retains the necessary authority to exercise discretion as subdivisions come before them.

Discussion of Sanpete County Ordinance for Solar Farms and Data Centers.

The Commission transitioned to a detailed deliberation regarding the development of specialized land use ordinances for solar energy facilities and data centers. Members reviewed several example ordinances hosted on the Google Drive, noting that while the data center research is extensive and ongoing, the solar farm ordinance draft appears nearly complete. A key provision discussed was the inclusion of a decommissioning bond, specifically proposed at 125% of the estimated removal cost. This bond is intended to ensure that if a facility reaches the end of its life or is abandoned, the financial burden of equipment removal and land reclamation does not fall on county taxpayers. Additional research was introduced regarding "dual-use" agriculture and infrastructure requirements, specifically

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mandating that all internal electrical lines be buried to preserve the landscape and allow for potential grazing beneath the panels, similar to recent agreements seen in Box Elder County. The conversation focused heavily on the draft solar ordinance's purpose and intent, which emphasizes preserving agricultural land, irrigation systems, and grazing rights. One member presented research suggesting the ordinance should explicitly "prevent" the conversion of productive farmland into industrial-scale solar facilities. This sparked a debate on the legality of such strong language; members cautioned that using the word "prevent" could be interpreted as "exclusionary zoning." Legally, this could be defined as a "taking" of private property rights, potentially leading to litigation against the county by landowners who feel they are being denied a legitimate business use of their land. To mitigate these legal risks, a proposal was made to utilize a "floating overlay zone." This strategy would allow the county to exclude solar facilities from specific designated zones—such as high-value agricultural, residential, or sensitive lands—while allowing them in other areas subject to strict conditional use permits. By adopting an exclusionary approach (listing where it is *not* allowed) rather than a purely permissive one, the county maintains better control over its land use without infringing on the fundamental rights of landowners who may need to lease their property to manage debt. The Commission agreed that the purpose and intent should be reworded to focus on maintaining continuity with the county's General Plan and protecting public health, safety, and welfare, rather than explicitly "preventing" use. The Commission then reviewed specific prohibitions outlined in the draft, which include banning utility-scale solar in agricultural areas enrolled in Greenbelt or federal agricultural assessment programs, as well as lands served by irrigation infrastructure. It was noted that current residential rooftop and small-scale accessory solar systems would be exempt. However, members expressed concern that because the majority of the county is zoned as agricultural or sensitive land, a total ban on those zones might effectively leave no room for such facilities. Suggestions were made to consider solar in industrial or public facility zones, though these areas are currently very limited in size within the unincorporated county. A discussion regarding the potential for a "temporary land use regulation," or moratorium, followed. A six-month moratorium was proposed to provide a legally sound window for the Commission to finalize these ordinances without being forced to process new applications in the interim.

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Such a moratorium would have a narrow scope, targeting large-scale facilities requiring electrical connections over 10 megawatts. Members noted that solar developers are currently seeking "loopholes" in surrounding counties, making it critical to start the clock on this regulation to prevent a rush of applications that might bypass updated standards.

The Commission addressed the specific impacts of data centers, noting their immense water requirements and the strain they place on local aquifers. While data centers are often touted for economic development, members observed that they provide high tax revenue but very few permanent jobs after the construction phase. The group acknowledged that while some states use strict environmental recycling mandates to mitigate water use, Sanpete County remains isolated with limited infrastructure. The Commission concluded that the goal should be to create requirements so rigorous regarding water recycling and power usage that they discourage developers who are not a perfect fit for the county's resources. The Commission reaffirmed its commitment to bi-monthly work meetings to finalize these ordinances before the proposed moratorium period expires.